

REPORT TO THE CABINET

27.06.17

Cabinet Member: Councillor Gareth Wyn Griffith

Subject: Provision of Public Convenience in Gwynedd

Contact Officer: Gwyn Morris Jones, Head of Highways and Municipal

Decision Sought

- i) To achieve the £244,000 cuts to the service by implementing the Partnership Scheme with Town and Community Councils in order to keep the majority of the existing public toilets in the County open in the future.
 - ii) To close toilets where community has no intention or interest in contributing towards a partnership by 1 October, 2017.
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Introduction

Following the Gwynedd Challenge engagement exercise, the Council in its meeting of 3 March, 2016 recommended making cuts which included 'closing 50 out of 73 public toilets in the County'.

In its meeting of 7 June, 2016, the Cabinet supported the recommendation of the Communities Scrutiny Committee, to amend the decision to cut £244,000 from the service by first seeking to establish partnerships with local communities in order to avoid closing the facilities whilst achieving the same amount of savings.

In its meeting of 17 January, 2017 the Cabinet decided to achieve the £244,000 service cuts by implementing the Partnership Scheme with Town and Community Councils in order to keep the majority of the County's existing toilets open in the future, and to authorize the Head of Highways and Municipal to ensure formal agreements with Town and Community Councils interested in partnering. The Cabinet also requested that a further report on progress with regards the Scheme be submitted to its meeting in June, 2017.

Reasons for recommending the decision

The Partnership Scheme offers the possibility of keeping significantly more toilets open in the future when compared to that anticipated with the previous option for cuts.

In implementing the Partnership Scheme it is anticipated that at least 51 public toilets can be kept open with the support and co-operation of Town and Community Councils. This is possible despite the cuts to the Council's relevant budget.

There are other advantages to the Communities and this Council in implementing the Scheme e.g. the possibility of developing alternative arrangements for maintaining the provision in future with at least 35 toilets having the potential for the community to take more responsibility for their maintenance.

It is very encouraging that so many town and community councils have shown the aspiration to work in partnership with the Council in order to safeguard the appropriate provision in their communities for the future.

Relevant Considerations

Under the Partnership Scheme, up to 22 toilets are under threat of closure.

It should be noted that two of these toilets are near Blue Flag beaches and that their closure could lead to losing this status.

It should also be noted that at least 3 other toilets under threat of closure are at locations of importance to tourists. At these locations it is recommended that alternative provision should be sought where there is no interest in partnering.

The table in the Appendix notes where alternative provision is available by means of the Community Toilet Grant Scheme at the locations where toilet/s are under threat of closure. The table also notes other possible alternative options should the Council decide to contribute and extend the Grant Scheme.

Equality Assessment

Before making a decision, every individual in the public sector has a duty to consider the likely effect of the decision on people with characteristics protected by the equalities legislation (Equalities Act 2010). In presenting this saving to the Cabinet and Council in March, 2016, equalities impact assessment was prepared and which identified the possible effect of the original scheme. This was taken into account in making the decision on the level of financial cuts.

This equality assessment has been reviewed in consideration of the effect of implementing the Partnership Scheme (see the Appendix to this Report). The intention of the scheme is to provide Community Councils with the opportunity to maintain public conveniences in their area. This is again an attempt to mitigate the possible effect of the cuts on public provisions. To date, it appears that the scheme continues to address and mitigate the effect of the cuts in view of equalities. The assessment will be kept under review as the scheme develops.

Public Health Bill

This draft bill is at the stage whereby it is awaiting Royal Assent. In terms of public conveniences, the overall aim of the legislation is to ensure that all local authorities assesses the needs of its community in relation to the provision, and that it takes a strategic and transparent approach to how citizens can be provided access to public toilets in the County. Obviously, in consulting and seeking partnerships with communities in the County, and in seeking to ensure provision where there is a strategic need, implementing the Partnership Scheme is likely to meet the relevant aims of this proposed bill.

Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The scheme has provided a means of sustaining facilities in a large number of locations through a process of partnering with Community Councils. It is considered that this scheme and its development is in keeping with the principles of the Act.

Next steps and timetable

On receiving the approval of the Cabinet to implement the Partnership Scheme to achieve the £244, 000 cuts it is expected:

- i) that the Department continues to hold discussions with the community and others with regards the future of toilets under threat of closure, and to accept that some toilets will have to close if a partnership arrangement is possible by 1 October, 2017.
 - ii) that the Department will, without delay, consult with staff and relevant unions with regards the effect on posts of closing toilets under threat.
 - iii) the Department will start holding discussions with those communities who have expressed an interest in taking more responsibility for maintaining the provision in the future.
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Opinion of the Statutory Officers

Monitoring Officer:

A number of factors need to be balanced in developing this plan. These are considered in an appropriate manner in the report. Obviously, and building on the decision of the Cabinet in January there is a need to move to a final resolution of the scheme. The recommendation provides an appropriate timetable to achieve this end in a reasonable manner.

Chief Finance Officer:

I had welcomed the alternative scheme of partnering with Community and Town Councils, which means keeping the provision open and operational, as well as maintaining the employment of cleaning workers. As not every Town / Community Council has taken advantage of the opportunity to keep their facilities open, action must be taken to close those, in order to achieve the savings of £244k that have already been decided upon as part of the 'Gwynedd Challenge' consultation and the 2016/17 - 2017/18 financial strategy. While he's taking early action to close those facilities, of course the Head of Highways and Municipal should continue to negotiate to persuade the relevant Community and Town Councils to join the partnering scheme.
